He was bent over, huffing and puffing with exertion, searching for the cause of the problem. He straightened up and stroked his silver beard in contemplation – certain that there was nothing wrong with the propulsion mechanism – they were all fed, watered and raring to go. He just couldn’t get the damn thing to get off the ground and, glancing at his pocket watch, realised that if he didn’t solve this problem soon, he was going to be very, very late and all across the world, lots of young ones were going to be very, very disappointed. The payload was ok – he’d double checked it and it wasn’t any heavier than it was this time last year, so where was the problem?

He kicked the nearest runner in frustration and was harrumphing away, throwing his arms in the air, when a small figure loomed by his side bearing a torch in one hand and a spanner in the other.

‘Problems?’ the small figure asked casually.

‘What? Oh, it’s you. Yes, well, I just can’t get this thing going and I’m blowed if I know what the problem is.’

‘What do you mean it *won’t go*?’

‘Exactly that – it won’t go. I’ve checked everything and it just won’t go. If I can’t take off soon, I’m going to be horribly late and if I can’t get this thing going at all … well, I just don’t know what I’ll do’ he replied glancing down at his Chief Mechanic Elf.

‘Kicking the runners won’t help, Santa. If you hurt your foot, we’ll have to get the Elf in Safety to look at you. Get it? Elf in Safety … oh, never mind. Stop panicking and let me have a look for you.’ CM Elf offered helpfully.

‘Oh, great – thanks. I’ve checked everything and I’m certain I haven’t missed anything. Please be quick though – I’m so far behind time I just don’t…’

‘Relax, Santa. Chill out - it can’t be too difficult to find the problem. It’s not exactly Sleigh Science, is it?’ CM Elf joked as he shone the torch under the sleigh and ran his hands over every surface, looking for the problem.

It was after a couple of minutes of thorough searching and checking (with Santa pacing impatiently in the background, muttering and constantly glancing at his pocket watch) that CM Elf cried exultantly ‘Found it Santa – I’ve found the problem!’

‘Really? That’s excellent. What’s it all about, Elfie?’ Santa asked expectantly.

‘Well, you wouldn’t believe it Santa…’

‘Yes, yes…’ Santa prompted, hopping from foot to foot excitedly.

‘…the Christmas brake’s on!’